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SUBJECT : Monthly Report on Violence and Human Rights: March 1978

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SUMMARY. Political violence in March continued at February's high level. A number of incidents (including 7 deaths) were related to the March 5 elections. Some 40-odd incidents resulted in 25 deaths, 6 persons wounded, and 4 kidnapped apparently for political reasons. In addition to the pronounced election-related violence, activity in Escuintla may have netted the EGP $23,000 and resulted in property loss estimated at about $1 million. A clash between soldiers and EGP guerrillas in the Petén resulted in one soldier and one EGP guerrilla dead. Governmental violence was at a low incidence, although western campesinos charged continued Army harrassment in Huehuetenango, and students charged police with beatings and torture. Despite labor strikes and unrest, the national elections were held on schedule. U.S. observers received a good deal of attention and left sensing they had made a modest contribution through their presence. Also noteworthy was the congressional approval of the San Jose Convention. END SUMMARY.

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Election-related Violence. Unlike February, election violence took a turn for the worse in March. Seven persons died and four were wounded in incidents connected with the elections. The killing of an electoral delegate for Zacapa marred an otherwise peaceful election day (March 5). After the elections, as fraud charges spread and as "victors" emerged, tempers rose. This was especially true in the Oriente where most of the election violence took place, principally between MLN supporters and PID/PR/CAO partisans.

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Drafted by: POL:RFWing:mc

Comments and Classification Approved by: DCM:GRAndrews

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In Jutiapa, two PID leaders were machine-gunned returning from a Lucas victory celebration. In Monjas, Jalapa Department, the auxiliary mayor was shot and killed. In Zacapa, a PID/PR candidate for deputy was killed, as was the MLN mayor-elect of Los Amates (Izabal) and an aide.

Also in Jalapa, the MLN mayor (who is also justice of the peace) was wounded by PR gunmen who were later arrested. In Guatemala City, an army colonel was wounded outside MLN headquarters under unclear circumstances. One report held that the pro-Lucas colonel dressed in civilian clothes was shot by one of the MLN guards after he had taunted MLN officials. Elsewhere, the candidate for deputy of the PID/PR in Suchitepéquez was injured by attackers; and in El Quiché several persons in a van were wounded by machine-gun fire, including the PID departmental leader.

During and after the elections, the government security forces imposed routine mobile and stationary surveillance on entrances and exits to Guatemala City. These forces were on the lookout for arms and ammunition, but also sought to prevent access to the capital of MLN forces or other potentially disruptive groups from the interior which might have sought to alter the election outcome. In addition, security forces patrolled the countryside in the eastern part of the country in search of supposed MLN guerrillas and arms depots.

In a raid on the house of prominent MLN leader and reportedly ex-chief of comisionados militares, David PACHECO, three persons were arrested and a small arms cache seized. The three were released by the judges who held that the charges were without merit. The local chief of police expressed outrage and demanded the judges be fired. Hernan HURTADO, head of the Guatemala court system and President of the Supreme Court, did just that, but not before scolding th policeman for speaking out of turn. The judges retorted that they had dismissed the case because they were being constantly threatened by pistol-packing MLN supporters of Pacheco and his cohorts. It also came out that one of the judges was related to one of the defendants.

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Later, Minister of Defense Otto SPIEGELER denied that Pacheco was connected with the military, "much less a comisionado militar." (Comisionados are unpaid civilians who serve the military as informants, recruiters, etc. They are authorized to carry arms and have limited authority, e.g., picking up those fleeing conscription.) Spiegeler pointed out, however, that alcaldes auxiliares (mayoral assistants) were appointed by mayors and were authorized to carry arms. Spiegeler did not specifically say that Pacheco was an alcalde auxiliar.

Guerrilla Violence. Six armed men dressed in olive green entered the Finca El Potrero in La Democracia, Escuintla, and after threatening to kill any who resisted, stole $23,000. They announced they were members of the EGP and before leaving set fire to cane fields. High winds carried the fire to nearby plantations. Total damages were estimated at $1 million. To date, the EGP has not acknowledged this incident.

On March 12, an army patrol from Poptún was attacked by an EGP band in the Petén. The commander of the patrol was killed, as was one of the attackers, identified in the press as Fermín de Leon Solís (aka Juan Roberto ORELLANA). The other EGP guerrillas escaped.

In Zacapa, ten armed men in olive green garb, led by guides identified in the press as Emilio MORALES and Isaias RIVERA, kidnapped a campesino (Vitoriano MONROY) and his two sons. Another campesino was kidnapped in the Petén by unknown gunmen. Nothing further has been heard of these campesinos.

Government-associated Violence. In Huehuetenango, small landholders of Ixtahuacán Chiquito continued to complain of abuse by soldiers in that area since mid-January (Guatemala A-24), including dusk-to-dawn curfew and miscellaneous shooting incidents. The EGP has been active in this area.

Recent arrests of students may be related to increasing student complaints about government failure to meet the needs of the secondary level. These complaints manifested themselves in student strikes in April and May. The incidents seem to have

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a pattern: A student may initially "disappear" or be taken away by unknown armed men and later turn up in jail where he complains that he has been tortured. Often he is charged with a common crime.. According to one secondary student association, student leader Edgar Rolando BOCH Noriega was taken and held by police without a warrant. Police denied knowledge of the whereabouts of Boch, who was allegedly beaten and tortured. According to the press, student pressure forced police to hand Boch over to a juvenile court. The charge was a typical one -- possession of marijuana.

Human Rights Atmospherics. Shortly before the March 5 election, government workers declared a strike which threatened to postpone the elections. Ignoring provocation, the government refrained from action against the workers, negotiated with them down to the wire, and ultimately capitulated by granting large pay increases. In this way, telephone and telegraph service, vital for carrying out the elections, were restored by the time they were needed.

An interesting experiment was the appearance at the polls of foreign observers, two from the U.S. and one from West Germany. The observers, representing U.S. and German political groups, described their election role as symbolic. They later told the press that they believed their presence was of modest usefulness to those who favored honest elections. They recommended the practice of such observers be continued and expanded in countries where it could be useful. Somewhat less generous in private (Guatemala 1426), they took note of fraud committed ~~in the~~ vote count by all parties, together with the cynical business-as-usual attitude of many political leaders.

On March 30, the Guatemalan Congress gave its approval to ratification of the American Human Rights Convention. It then went to the Executive branch for drafting of reservations designed to reconcile Guatemalan accession with domestic law, e.g., on capital punishment.

Statistics. During March, 41 politically-related incidents produced 25 deaths. Of these deaths, 3 were in Guatemala City, 4 were in the Indian highlands, 11 were in the Oriente, one was in the Pacific lowlands, and 3 each were in Izabal and the Petén.

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